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SUBJECT: SENEGALESE PRESIDENT WADE DOWNSIZES CABINET

REF: Dakar 2332

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On December 3, Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade fired 11 ministers (including eight women) and hired one new one. This decision fulfills his recent promise to reduce the size of the cabinet to moderate government spending. The new cabinet features 28 members, down from 38, with a more rational configuration of portfolios. This downsizing is not an effective budget reduction tool as the real motivations are political. Wade is seeking to regain the political high ground with this largely symbolic re-shuffle to answer the challenges posed to his power by rioting street vendors in Dakar. End summary.

A Balanced Cabinet

¶2. (SBU) By reducing size of the cabinet, Wade hopes to rationalize the distribution of portfolios, while maintaining the right balance between the ruling PDS (Democratic Party of Senegal) and its allies. Eight women lost their positions arguably as a response to wide-spread criticisms that they had served largely as window dressing and had no expertise or experience that justified their appointments in the first place. The removal of two ministers close to the political movement "Generation du Concrete" led by the President's son Karim indicates that Wade might be responding to persistent and deepening criticism that Karim had too much influence in the government. Wade kept his political allies, the two seasoned politicians, Djibo Ka and Abdou Rahim Agne, who are former socialists, as well as the enthusiastic but inexperienced Bocar Dia who maintains his portfolio as Minister of Information but loses the position of spokesperson of the Government.

Watching the Dinosaurs

¶3. (SBU) Wade promoted three members of the PDS's old guard to the rank of Minister of State, increasing their tally to ten from seven. Technically such ministers answer directly to the President not the Prime Minister. By having these politically powerful, but potentially disruptive, figures report to the President, Wade is attempting to free the technocrat Prime Minister to focus on resolving the country's increasing economic problems. Moreover, a reduced cabinet increases Prime Minister Cheikh Hadjibou Soumare and Finance Minister Abdoulaye Diop's ability to adopt policies to improve public finances and governance and earn the confidence of donors. This is a priority task for Wade whose government recently experienced the first manifestations - in the form of rioting by street vendors and student strikes -- of growing public discontent with the state of the economy.

Respond to Social Demands

¶4. (SBU) The symbolic cabinet reshuffle serves primarily to reduce public pressure on the government by demonstrating to a frustrated populace that Wade is listening to their concerns. A member of the

President's Communication Unit told PolFsn that the President is planning to move fast with the adoption of reforms to make people forget recent street riots and confrontations with the unions. Ms. Maimouna Sourang Ndir, the Minister for Quality of Life, who led the recent operation to remove street vendors in Dakar, has been removed even though she was just executing the President's orders. Mr. Habibou Ndiaye lost his portfolio as Minister of Commerce for his poor management of the GOS's dispute with bakers over the cost of bread and his inability to communicate to the people why the prices of staple foods have been on the rise. Minister of Animal Husbandry Oumou Khairi Gueye Seck was fired for her failure to implement a proper immunization program to stop an equine plague that killed at least two thousand horses in recent months.

A More Rational Cabinet

¶15. (SBU) An NGO leader who works closely with the Prime Minister told PolFsn that Soumare wanted a team of fifteen ministers and the President had agreed to twenty but finally went to twenty-eight to preserve both political and geographic balance in the cabinet. Soumare will now work with a smaller and more manageable team. For instance, the Minister of Infrastructure is now in charge of the whole transportation sector while agriculture and animal husbandry have been woven into one ministry. Bio-energy, renewable energies and scientific research are now also in one ministry rather than two. Finally, the Minister of Senegalese Living Abroad has been put in charge of tourism (ostensibly we are told to make use of Senegalese expatriates to do informal marketing for the country's tourism industry).

A New Comer

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¶16. (U) The only new member of the cabinet is Mr. Diame Signate, a humanities and social science professor at Cheikh Anta Diop University and director of Cultural Programs of the local government of the City of Dakar. He will be in charge of technical and vocational education. Signate formerly a member of the Socialist Party joined the PDS in 2001. His appointment is emblematic of Wade's strategy to drain opposition parties of their leadership by opening the doors of power to some of their leaders whom he euphemistically calls "new militants."

COMMENT

¶17. (SBU) The newly-appointed cabinet is likely to be provisional. Wade continues to search for a lasting solution to the erosion of support for the ruling PDS. He is in the process of negotiating some form of reconciliation with Idrissa Seck (the former prime minister that broke with him and ran against him last year) and might even be considering pursuing a dialogue with the opposition in an effort to achieve a national consensus on the country's direction.

SMITH